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Le chinois ça s'apprend

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FIRENZE architettura

2.2013



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In copertina:
Claudio Parmiggiani
Senza Titolo, Galleria di Arte Moderna, Bologna, 2003



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FIRENZE architettura

2.2013

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Amateur Architecture Studio Wang Shu & Lu Wenyu

Le chinois, ça s'apprend

Fabrizio Arrigoni

La neve se n'è andata dal Chung-nan:

È quasi primavera.

Belli i colori azzurri in lontananza

Sopra le strade brune.

Mille cocchi, miriadi di cavalli

Batton le Nove Strade.

Chi volta il capo e guarda la montagna?

Non un sol uomo.

Po Chu'i, Vedendo in distanza il monte

Chung-nan da una strada di Ch'ang-an

Il Museo di Storia (宁波 博物馆) noto anche come il Museo Yinzhou (鄞州 博物馆) sorge, pesante come una montagna, in una zona di recente espansione a Ningbo, città nella provincia di Zhejiang, distretto di Yinzhou, Cina. Commissionato nel 2003 l'edificio è stato inaugurato il 5 dicembre 2008 dopo due anni di lavori. Su un vasto lotto di 45.000 mq. l'edificio ospita numerose testimonianze e reperti di storia della regione - dalla cultura Hemudu alla contemporaneità - su una superficie complessiva di 60 *mu* - circa 303.250.000 mq.¹ Amateur Architecture Studio ha firmato l'opera; l'atelier, con sede nell'antica capitale Hangzhou, è stato fondato nel 1997 da Wang Shu e sua moglie Lu Wenyu. Wang Shu - nato nel 1963 a Urumqi nella provincia occidentale dello Xinjiang - ha studiato al Nanjing Institute of Technology e nel 2000 ha conseguito il Ph.D presso la prestigiosa Tongji University di Shanghai. Nel 2012 Wang Shu è stato il primo architetto cinese a vincere il Pritzker Architecture Prize.² Osservata a posteriori l'educazione fondante per questo autore non accade tuttavia nelle aule delle accademie quanto nei cantieri assiduamente frequentati durante le escursioni attraverso il paese. Una immersione nelle pratiche

ereditate - un prendere conoscenza delle prassi anonime che la tradizione ha selezionato e codificato - compiuta in quegli stessi anni, i novanta, in cui la Cina conosce i più radicali rivolgimenti degli assetti urbani secondo paradigmi conoscitivi e apparati valoriali del tutto eteronomi - *newness, craziness, bigness, Westernness*: un lessico della globalizzazione banale, anodino, senza sedimento.³ Le indagini dell'atelier di Wang Shu - sulle memorie collettive, sulle sintassi compositive, sui procedimenti artigianali - possono essere comprese solo se profilate sullo sfondo dei processi economici promossi dalla riforma di Deng Xiaoping sul finire degli anni settanta del novecento e dal consistente quanto rapido neourbanesimo da esse derivato. Una migrazione dalle zone rurali verso le enclaves industriali - "factory towns" - e dei servizi che ha coinvolto una popolazione di oltre 400 milioni di individui. Esempio il caso di Shēnzhèn, una delle cinque *Special Economic Zones* (SEZs): un insieme di villaggi di pescatori con poco più di 30.000 abitanti sul finire del novecento, oggi *generic city* di oltre 12 milioni di cittadini.⁴ Un modello di sviluppo diverso rispetto a quello riferibile alla "città socialista" di matrice sovietica: le liberalizzazioni hanno prodotto non solo fenomeni di incremento e crescita abnormi, bensì hanno investito direttamente le parti di tessuto edilizio consolidato in precedenza raramente coinvolte nelle azioni di rinnovamento. Dunque non solo borghi irriconoscibili rispetto alle primitive perimetrazioni ma città ridotte a «perfect blank canvas»⁵ da pianificazioni che hanno promosso la completa demolizione degli stessi quartieri centrali. Wang appartiene a una generazione di intellettuali e architetti - tra i

Ningbo History Museum - Cina
Amateur Architecture Studio -
Wang Shu & Lu Wenyu - Hangzhou
2003-2008

Gruppo di progettazione:
Song Shuhua, Jiang Weihua, Chen Lichao

Strutture:
Shentu Tuanbing, Chen Yongbing

Foto:
Evan Chakroff, Serena Gardiner, Kyna Leski
May inChina, Yding Yang, Addison Godel





2



3

quali Wu Xuefu (Communications University of China), Peng Peikeng (Tsinghua University), Liu Xiaodu (Urbanus Architects), Li Xiaodong (L. X. Atelier) - che pone con decisione il problema della molteplice, plurale eredità spirituale della Cina, quale terreno fecondo, lascito prezioso su cui fondare le scelte poiché «a lost tradition means a lost future»;⁶ è il conflitto, ormai generalizzato, tra flussi e luoghi, tra il capitale ubiquitario della finanza e le irriducibili materialità situate: «My starting point is always the site, I need to understand about the life, the people, the weather (...) I know something existed before me - my buildings come from somewhere (...) other architects spoke about space. I talk about typology and prototype; the prototype relates to memory».⁷ Amateur Architecture Studio è sigla che segnala questa contrapposizio-

ne, primo gesto di opposizione manifesta nei confronti della *ratio* professionale dominante. *Amateur* è termine europeo: slittandone i significati in oriente otterremmo la figura del letterato (*wenren*, uomo di cultura), sovente richiamata dal Nostro nella versione del letterato pittore.⁸ Il Ningbo History Museum è opera paradigmatica che salda ricerca espressiva, sperimentazioni tettoniche, sapienze tramandate. Il museo si offre come un massiccio blocco isolato steso secondo l'asse nord-sud; le funzioni cardine sono state distribuite su tre livelli - salvo ricavare un ulteriore piano per le attività di servizio. Al piano nobile si dispongono le tre gallerie di arte antica mentre al piano terra, a ridosso del salone di ingresso, due vasti ambienti sono dedicati alle esposizioni temporanee (*special exhibition*). Le aree pubbliche sono servite da un articolato

sistema di percorsi verticali e orizzontali da determinare «a labyrinth of pathways».⁹ Due incisioni di circa trenta metri nelle cortine murarie di lunghezza maggiore permettono l'entrata al complesso; il passaggio avviene attraverso un ponte lastricato¹⁰ che recide per intero il corpo della fabbrica separando un'ala a meridione destinata agli uffici e all'amministrazione. In posizione mediana rispetto a questa via si spalanca la corte maggiore: la luce che cade nel catino sottolinea la soglia di accesso.¹¹ Sono cinque i cortili che intervallano le superfici coperte, tra loro dissimili per geometria e ampiezza; oltre che assolvere ai loro compiti di utilità - sicurezza, illuminazione, areazione - queste lacerazioni allestiscono un ordito di mutue connessioni tra dentro e fuori, contraddicendo il volto compatto e introverso della fabbrica. Una complessità e



una intensificazione confermata dai cinque monoliti, pressoché ciechi tagliati “a colpi d’ascia” (*fu pi cun*),¹² che al terzo piano affollano il tetto terrazza; un dispositivo spaziale che decostruisce l’unitarietà dell’intervento alla grande scala in una arcipelago di elementi, analogo di un villaggio di scala inferiore. Si è fatto cenno ai ripetuti richiami alla pittura; tali corrispondenze riguardano non solo il costume etico o la condizione sociale dell’uomo di lettere, ma investono in profondità gli stessi modi del comporre. La pittura di paesaggio in Cina non è stata mai immaginata e ordinata attraverso il dominio di una immobilizzante prospettiva monofocale; così come l’inchiostro sulla seta trattiene simultaneamente una “distanza profonda” (*shen-yuan*), una “distanza elevata” (*kao-yuan*) e una “distanza piatta” (*p’ing-yuan*) al pari la fabbrica di

Wang non è riducibile ad un’unica sintassi visiva, vivendo nelle tensioni, nelle interazioni generate dalle coppie polari e complementari di interno-esterno (*li-wai*), lontano-vicino (*yuan-chin*), manifesto-latente (*xian-yin*), pieno-vuoto (*shih-hsü*).¹³ Un universo frequentato da poche cose ma sfuggente, mai afferrabile con un solo sguardo: «se non c’è semplicità non si può realizzare la molteplicità» (*Discorsi sulla pittura del monaco Cucurbita amara* - Shitao, dinastia Qing). Ma gli intrecci, i legami gettati con il trascorso non si esauriscono in raffinate trame concettuali. Se anche per l’architetto vale la norma che “l’idea precede il pennello” (*cai bi xian*) tuttavia a differenza del gesto risoluto quanto solitario del pittore l’evento della costruzione è accadimento collettivo capace di fondere in un orizzonte comune un insieme di soggetti e mai del

Pagine precedenti:

1

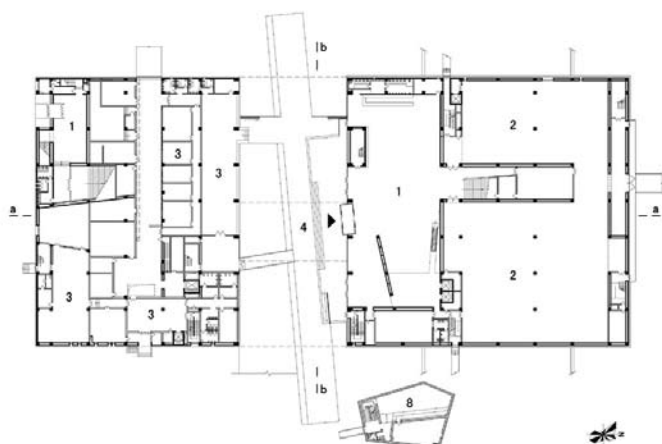
Il tetto terrazza: scorcio verso Nord tra i volumi della Bamboo Carving Gallery e la Folk Customs Gallery
Foto © Kyna Leski

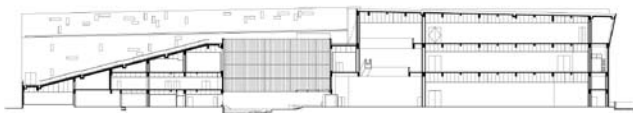
2 - 3

Particolari del fronte a oriente
Foto © May inChina, Foto © Yding Yang

4

Muraglia wapan
Foto © Addison Godel

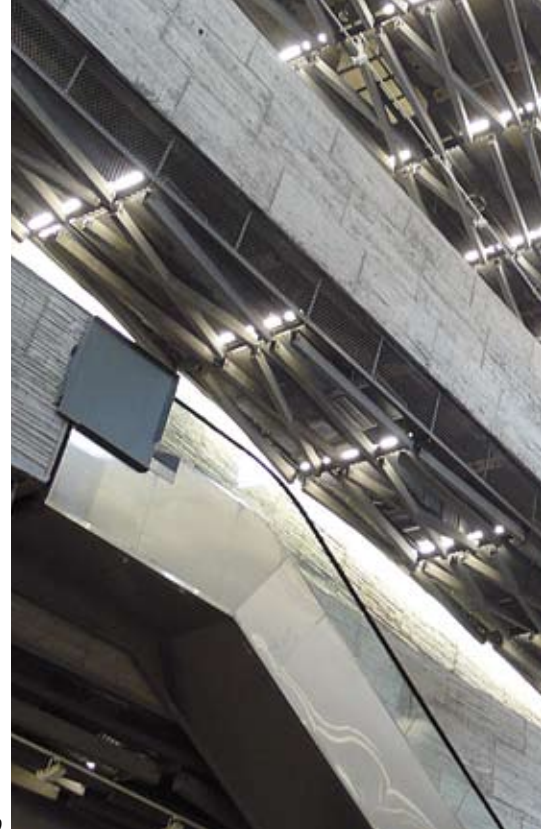




- 5
 Vista della corte centrale dal tetto terrazza
 6 - 7
 Pianta piano terra, piano primo, piano secondo,
 prospetto a est, sezione longitudinale
 Legenda planimetrie:
 1 hall di ingresso/main hall
 2 sale espositive/exhibition gallery
 3 uffici/offices
 4 ingresso principale/entrance
 5 cortile/courtyard
 6 sala polifunzionale/multi-purpose room
 7 caffetteria/cafe
 8 ristorante/restaurant







10

Pagine precedenti:

8

Vista dell'ingresso da meridione

9

Vista del blocco del ristorante

10 - 11 - 12

Interni: galleria e hall principale

Foto © Evan Chakroff (evanchakroff.com),

Foto © Serena Gardiner

Pagine successive:

13

Zhu Ruoji detto Shitao ("Onda di Pietra"),

La montagna sola (28,8x34,5 cm)

Beijing Museo del Palazzo

tutto prevedibile secondo le coordinate, astratte quanto atemporali, del progetto: «In the construction process, you'll find that the workers have added their own techniques [...] for example, they arranged the bricks in a traditional pattern from clothes. I didn't tell them to do this, but they understood how, and they did it». Un equilibrio di pre-visione e spontaneità, disciplina e intuizione: «I like this process: you start with a certain kind of thinking, but as it progresses, you can't control the result completely, but the result is still controlled. I think this is very near traditional Chinese philosophy - how to balance nature and human beings' abilities».¹⁴ Quello descritto è il caso della muraglia *wapan*, impiegata, assieme al cemento faccia vista, su tutti i fronti. Una tecnica edificatoria vernacolare diffusa tra le umili case della regione del Jiang Nan che a Ningbo conquista una configurazione inedita.¹⁵ Una enigmatica architettura di spolio stratificata con oltre due milioni di pezzi di recupero tra mattoni, pietre, tegole, ceramiche; uno sciame di piccoli manufatti le cui fogge e colorazioni tradiscono l'originaria provenienza: dalle dinastie Ming e Qing sino ad alcuni reperti

Tang, vecchi di 1500 anni.¹⁶ Le facciate sono state successivamente incise da forature di grandezza minima secondo patterns accidentali, in analogia a certi fianchi di rupe con i loro minuscoli anfratti, rifugio per la preghiera di eremiti e monaci. Più che nella costituzione fisica risiede in tale cura e manipolazione delle *discendenze* la vocazione propriamente monumentale dell'edificio, *Zauberberg* letteralmente eretto con cumuli di tempo condensato, un tempo legato all'uomo, fatto dall'uomo per parafrasare Eugenio Montale. Massima concretezza e massima sottigliezza speculativa; le estese superfici mostrano la comunicazione, la non-disgiunzione di presenza ed assenza, di "c'è" e "non-c'è", di *you* e *wu*: il passato si ritrae ed emerge, si immerge e traspare, si perde e si (ri)presenta «come se non ci fosse - come se ci fosse».

Oscillazioni ermeneutiche, vibrazioni della percezione; nella calma solenne di una mattina di sole: le masse - imperfette ed esatte, polverose e secche - richiamano la potente immanenza di una fortezza, inespugnabile. Cambio atmosferico: ora le nebbie e le nubi avvolgono i volumi fin quasi a precipitarli nell'indistinto: i



12



profili noti si dissolvono, tramutandosi in qualcosa di più vasto ma indefinito; fragili rovine, residui masticati dalle stagioni sul procinto di disfarsi e tornare natura. Solo Monti e Acque, solo *shan-shui*.

¹ Cfr. <http://www.nbmuseum.cn/en/INTRODUCTION.asp>

² Il premio, fondato a Chicago nel 1979 da Jay A. Pritzker e sua moglie Cindy, è l'ultimo dei riconoscimenti ottenuti dallo Studio; tra essi segnaliamo l'Architecture Art Award of China (2003), Lu-Ban Prize (2009), lo Schelling Architecture Prize (2010), la Grande Médaille d'Or (2011). Si potrebbe eccepire che già nel 1983 la Hyatt Foundation laureò un autore nato a Guangzhou; tuttavia, sia per apprendistato che per cultura professionale, valutiamo I. M. Pei sostanzialmente riconducibile al *milieu* nordamericano.

³ «Between 1990 and 2000 I had no commissions, and I did not want a government or academic position either. I just wanted to work with craftsmen, gain experience on the ground and take no responsibility for the design – only for the construction. So I worked in the lowest levels of our society. Every day I worked at building sites from eight in the morning until midnight. While working and eating with the craftsmen, I started to wonder what had happened to our experience of tradition. Gradually, I gained confidence while learning everything about construction methods. Continuity is very important in my opinion. Tradition is continuity. During those years I began studying the history of art in Europe, India, Africa and America; as well as philosophy, movies and contemporary art – a practice I continue today. I believe in starting with a broad vision and condensing it to fit the local situation». «Wang Shu Local Hero» in movingcities.org, 2008.

⁴ Danish Architecture Centre (a cura di), *Co-Evolution*, Danish Architecture Centre - Decima Biennale di Architettura, Venezia 2006; Worldwatch Institute Re-

port, 2006 (www.worldwatch.org/pubs/sow/2006); UNDP, WHO, World Bank statistics 2004, 2005, 2006). Questo scenario sembra confermato dai recenti piani che prevedono un ulteriore inurbamento nei prossimi dodici anni come risposta alla crisi economica in atto cfr: Ian Johnson, *China's Great Uprooting: Moving 250 Million Into Cities*, "New York Times", 15 giugno 2013.

⁵ È stata Zaha Hadid ad avvicinare la Cina dei nostri giorni ad una gigantesca tela bianca a disposizione della prometeica, priva di vincoli, creatività del *designer*.

⁶ Wang Shu, *To Build a Diverse World Following the Natural Way*, Lecture presso UCLA, 29 febbraio 2012.

⁷ Una riflessione critica dettata anche da ragioni di ordine economico valutati gli investimenti sostenuti per i *landmark buildings* prodotti dalle *stararchitects* quali la CCTV Tower a Beijing di Rem Koolhaas costata cinque miliardi di yuan (\$783.80 million). Per l'intervista a Wang Shu cfr. http://www.e-architect.co.uk/architects/wang_shu_amateur_architecture_studio.htm

⁸ «I always think of myself firstly as a member of the Literati; and secondly, it was almost accident that I've learned to do architecture. From this perspective, the way I see things is differently from most other architects» da «Yang Lan - one on one - Wang Shu: The Reflection of Architecture» Chinese Network Television (CNTV). Un successivo aspetto che, data la sede che ospita questo scritto, vale menzionare è come l'atelier sia stato inteso dai coniugi Wang quale luogo di incontro e di scambio reciproco di esperienze e saperi tra studenti, operai, capomastri, architetti. Sulla ciclica ripresa del tema del letterato-architetto cfr.: Lai Delin, *Wang Shu: in the Context of the Revival and Development of Chinese Literati Architectural Tradition*, in "Architectural Journal", 2012 (5).

⁹ Wang Shu citato in: «Wang Shu & Lu Wenyu, Ningbo History Museum», GA Document, n. 112, *China Today*, May 2010; p. 95.

¹⁰ Il fiume poco profondo che scivola fin dentro la loggia di ingresso, la riva di ciottoli, lo stagno che cinge il museo a settentrione sono tutti richiami al Ta Shanyan (dinastia Tang) e alle molte architetture idrauliche sparse a Ningbo.

¹¹ Al pari del giardino cinese tradizionale gli ingressi sono numerosi; tra quelli pubblici uno, per morfologia discreto quanto eccentrico, è stato disposto sul fianco meridionale al di sotto di una corte; dal foyer una scala conduce alla galleria storica, alla galleria dei bambini e al piano-piazza della copertura.

¹² Il riferimento corre a Li Tang (1050-1130).

¹³ Sulla regola delle «Tre sezioni» o delle «Tre distanze» cfr. François Cheng, *Vide et plein. Le langage pictural chinois* (1979), trad. it. di M. Leone Barbella, *Il Vuoto e il Pieno*, Guida, Napoli 1989, pp. 66-70.

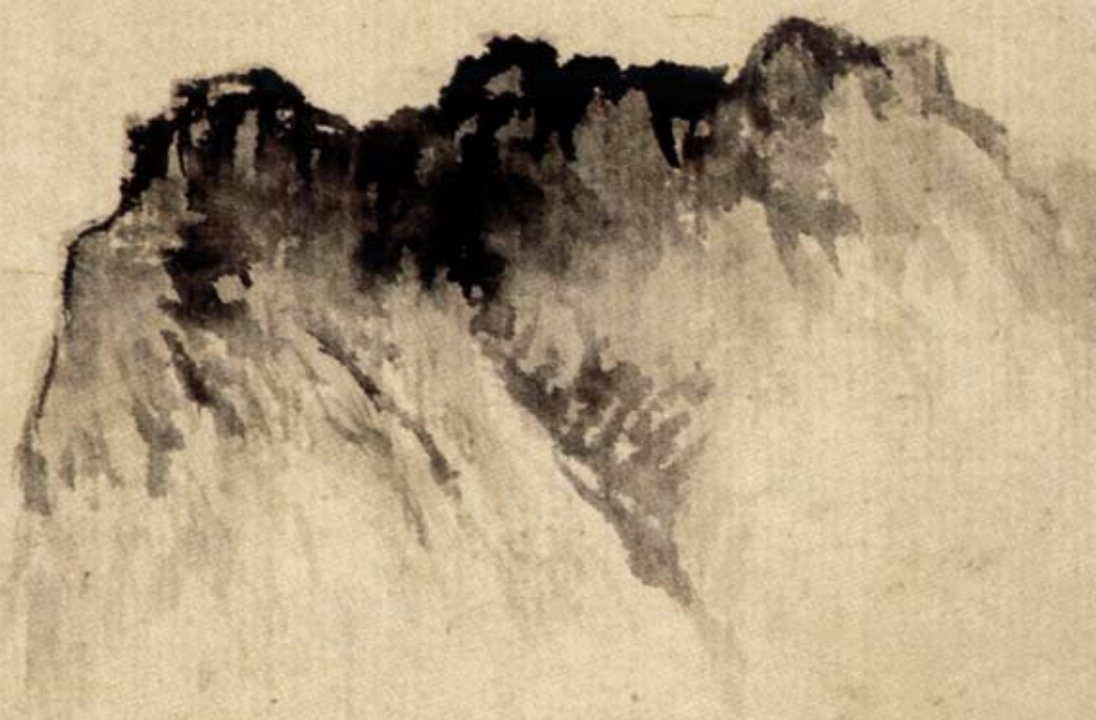
¹⁴ Cfr. Brendan McGettrick, *Why Wang Shu*, (New York, March 2012) ora in «Domus», <http://www.domusweb.it/content/domusweb/en/op-ed/2012/03/02/why-wang-shu.html>. La propensione al lavoro in cooperazione di questi autori non deve tuttavia disconoscere la dura battaglia da essi condotta nei confronti della committenza al fine di ottenere la piena responsabilità sulle fasi di esecuzione dell'opera.

¹⁵ L'attenzione ai materiali e alle prassi costruttive regionali è strategia costante di Amateur Architecture Studio; un ulteriore esempio è costituito dal Museo della strada imperiale della Dinastia Song Meridionale e dal restauro dei suoi resti a Hangzhou (2007-2009). Qui il telaio ligneo dell'arco che sostiene la copertura a sbalzo deriva da una tipologia strutturale dei ponti messa a punto nella provincia di Zhejiang e risalente all'XI secolo. Tale scelta, tuttavia, ha comportato necessariamente un riesame delle procedure ereditate per rispondere ai nuovi standards delle prestazioni statiche: l'antico non è mai catalogato come repertorio di stili individuali chiusi, bensì pensato come processo interindividuale aperto e dunque soggetto a revisione continua, a metamorfosi inesauribile.

¹⁶ «In Ningbo, we have found a unique brickwork technique. Recycling construction materials is quite popular in this region. Nearly every wall is built with a hybrid of different makes of bricks, you can count up to 84-87 different brick types within an area of 10 square meters on a wall - just imagine what an artistic state this technique has been grown into», Wang Shu citato in *Wang Shu Architecture*, a cura di Jiang Dai, City Walk Editorial Bord, Tonji University Press, 2012; p. 22.

何年
韻芳青冥
外年吳曦
精若木東
秋旅南岳觀
日出之作画
在詩中矣余
寫其趣忘時
四更代意在言
外大隄子也





峻極亭前
天聚紅散
巖畔四更
風仙霞綉
弄銀藻海
氣鏤金上
空放眼寰
中鈴狹三
置身才高
處存壯周

Amateur Architecture Studio Wang Shu & Lu Wenyu

Le chinois, ça s'apprend by Fabrizio Arrigoni

(page 22)



*"The snow is gone from Chung-nan:
It is almost spring.
Beautiful the blues in the distance
Above the brown roads.
A thousand coaches, myriads of horses
Traverse the Nine Roads.
Who turns his head to look at the mountain?
Not one sole man."
Po Chu'i, Seeing Mount Chung-nan in the Distance from a Road in Ch'ang-an*

The History Museum, also known as the Yinzhou Museum, rises, as ponderous as a mountain, in an area of recent expansion in Ningbo, a town in the province of Zhejiang, district of Yinzhou, China. Commissioned in 2003, the building was officially opened on 5 December 2008 after two years of work. Situated on a vast lot measuring 45,000 square meters, the building houses numerous exhibits and relics of the history of the region - from the Hemudu culture to the present day - covering an overall surface of 60 *mu* - about 303,250,000 square meters.¹ Amateur Architecture Studio designed the work; this firm, headquartered in the ancient capital Hangzhou, was founded in 1997 by Wang Shu and his wife Lu Wenyu. Wang Shu - born in 1963 in Urumqi in the western province of Xinjiang - studied at the Nanjing Institute of Technology and in 2000 earned a Ph.D. from the prestigious Tongji University in Shanghai. In 2012 Wang Shu was the first Chinese architect to win the Pritzker Architecture Prize.² In hindsight, however, this architect's foundational education was not forged in the halls of academe but at the building sites he visited assiduously during his travels around China. His was a full immersion in the practices handed down through the generations - a growing awareness of the anonymous praxis that tradition has selected and codified - experienced in the same decade, the 1990s, in which China underwent the most radical upheaval of its urban organization, following paradigms of knowledge and value systems that were completely heteronomous: newness, craziness, bigness, Westernness - a lexicon of dull, anodyne, shallow and still in flux globalization.³ The investigations carried out by Wang Shu's office - of collective memory, compositional syntax, artisanal procedures - can be understood only if projected against the backdrop of the economic processes set in motion by Deng Xiaoping's reform toward the end of the 1970s and by the neo-urbanism - as substantial as it was rapid - deriving from them. The migration from the rural areas to the industrial enclaves - "factory towns" - and urban services involved a population of more than 400 million people. An exemplary case is Shēnzhèn, one of the five Special Economic Zones (SEZs), a group of fishing villages with just over 30,000 inhabitants at the end of the twentieth century and today a generic city of more than 12 million people.⁴ This is a model of development that is different from that of the "Socialist city" conceived by the Soviets; the liberalizations have produced not only abnormal phenomena of increase and growth, but have had a direct impact on the parts of the built environment already existing, which were rarely involved in the actions of renewal. Therefore not only villages unrecognizable with respect to their earlier boundaries, but also cities reduced to being a "perfect blank canvas"⁵ by a type of urban planning that promoted the complete demolition even of the central neighborhoods. Wang belongs to a generation of intellectuals and architects - among them Wu Xuefu (Communications University of China), Peng Peikeng (Tsinghua University), Liu Xiaodu (Urbanus Archi-

texts), and Li Xiaodong (L.X. Atelier) - who determinedly posit the problem of China's manifold, plural spiritual identity as a fertile terrain and precious legacy on which to base their choices, since "a lost tradition means a lost future."⁶ This is the conflict, by now widespread, between flux and place, between the ubiquitous capital of finance and the irreducibly situated material: "My starting point is always the site. I need to understand about the life, the people, the weather... I know something existed before me - my buildings come from somewhere... Other architects spoke about space. I talk about typology and prototype: the prototype relates to memory."⁷ Amateur Architecture Studio is a signature that marks this counter-position, the first gesture of manifest opposition with regard to the dominant professional *ratio*. Amateur is a European term: sliding its meanings eastwards we would obtain the figure of the man of letters (*wenren*, man of culture), often recalled by Wang in the version of the erudite painter.⁸ The Ningbo History Museum is a paradigmatic work that melds together expressive research, tectonic experimentation, and knowledge handed down from generation to generation. The museum presents itself as a massive isolated block laid out on a north-south axis. Its key functions are distributed on three levels - plus a fourth level to house the service areas. The first and main floor holds three galleries of ancient art, while on the ground floor, adjacent to the entrance hall, two vast rooms are devoted to special exhibitions. The public areas are served by a system of vertical and horizontal itineraries laid out to create a "labyrinth of pathways."⁹ Two slits about thirty meters long in the longer outside walls permit entrance into the complex; the passage crosses a paved bridge¹⁰ which cuts completely through the building, separating a wing to the south for offices and the administration. Halfway along this route, the main courtyard opens up, where the natural light pouring into this basin indicates the threshold.¹¹ Five courtyards impose a cadence on the covered surfaces, dissimilar to each other in terms of geometry and size. Besides fulfilling their utilitarian functions of safety, illumination, and ventilation, these lacerations set up a weave of reciprocal connections between inside and outside, contradicting the compact, introverted face of the building. This complexity and intensification is underscored by the five essentially blind monoliths cut "by blows of the hatchet" (*fu pi cun*)¹² on the third floor occupying a large part of the roof terrace - a spatial device that deconstructs the unitarity of the large-scale whole into an archipelago of elements analogous to a village on a smaller scale. We have already noted the repeated references to painting; these correspondences concern not only ethical customs or the social status of the man of letters, but have a profound impact on the ways of composition itself. In China, landscape painting has never been conceived and ordered according to the dominion of an immobilizing one-point perspective. Just as ink on silk simultaneously captures a "deep distance" (*shen-yuan*), a "high distance" (*kao-yuan*), and a "flat distance" (*ping-yuan*), similarly Wang's building cannot be reduced to one sole visual syntax, but lives in the tension, the interactions generated by the polar and complementary pairs of inside-outside (*li-wai*), far-near (*yuan-chin*), manifest-latent (*xian-yin*), full-empty, solid-void (*shih-hsü*).¹³ This is a universe frequented by few things, but fleeting, never graspable with just one glance: "If there is no simplicity it is impossible to achieve multiplicity" (*Comments on Painting* by Shitao, Qing dynasty). But the interweaves, the ties created with the past are not exhausted in refined conceptual plots. If it is true also for architects that "the idea precedes the brush" (*cai bi xian*), nonetheless, as opposed to the gesture, as determined as it is solitary, of the painter, the event of construction is a collective happening capable of melding into a common horizon an ensemble of subjects, never completely predictable compared to the coordinates, as abstract as they are timeless, of the plans: "In the construction process, you'll find that the workers have added their own techniques... for example, they arranged the bricks in a traditional pattern from clothes. I didn't tell them to do this, but they understood how, and they did it." It is a balance between fore-sight and spontaneity, discipline and intuition. "I like this process: you start with a certain kind of thinking, but as it progresses, you can't control the result completely, but the result is still controlled. I think this is very near traditional Chinese philosophy - how to balance nature and human beings' abilities."¹⁴ What he is describing here is the case of the wapan wall, utilized, together with bare concrete, on all the façades. This is a vernacular building technique widely used on the modest houses of the Jiang Nan region which gains at Ningbo an unprecedented configuration,¹⁵ an enigmatic architecture of spoliation stratified with more than two million remnants recovered from other structures: bricks, stones, roof tiles, pottery, a swarm of small artifacts whose styles and colors betray their origins from the Ming and Qing dynasties up to some Tang pieces, more than 1500 years old.¹⁶ The façades were then pierced by small slits in random patterns, created an analogy with certain rock faces with their minuscule niches, a refuge for prayer for hermits and monks. More than in the physical makeup, it is in this care and manipulation of the heritage from the past that the monumental vocation, properly speaking, of the building lies, a *Zauberberg* literally erected with heaps of condensed time, a time bound to man, made for man, to paraphrase Eugenio Montale. Maximum concreteness and maximum speculative subtlety: the vast surfaces show the communication, the non-disjunction of presence and absence, of "there" and "not-there," of *you* and *wu*: the past retreats and emerges, submerges itself and shines through, is lost and (re)

appears “as if it were not there - as if it were”. Hermeneutic oscillations, vibrations of perception; in the solemn calm of a sunny morning: the masses - imperfect and precise, dusty and dry - recall the powerful immanence of a fortress, unassailable. A change of atmosphere, and now the fog and clouds envelope the volumes almost to the point of plunging them into indistinctness: the familiar silhouettes dissolve, turning into something vaster but undefined - fragile ruins, residues chewed by the seasons on the verge of falling apart and becoming a part of nature again. Just Mountains and Waters, just *shan-shui*.

Translation by Susan Scott

¹ See <http://www.nbmuseum.cn/en/INTRODUCTION.asp>.

² The prize, established in Chicago in 1979 by Jay A. Pritzker and his wife, Cindy, is the most recent award received by the Studio; others include the Architecture Art Award of China (2003), Lu-Ban Prize (2009), the Schelling Architecture Prize (2010), and the Grande Médaille d'Or (2011). One could object that already in 1983 the Hyatt Foundation had awarded a prize to an architect born in Guangzhou; however, in terms of both training and professional culture, we consider I.M. Pei to belong essentially to the North American milieu.

³ “Between 1990 and 2000 I had no commissions, and I did not want a government or academic position either. I just wanted to work with craftsmen, gain experience on the ground and take no responsibility for the design - only for the construction. So I worked in the lowest levels of our society. Every day I worked at building sites from eight in the morning until midnight. While working and eating with the craftsmen, I started to wonder what had happened to our experience of tradition. Gradually, I gained confidence while learning everything about construction methods. Continuity is very important in my opinion. Tradition is continuity. During those years I began studying the history of art in Europe, India, Africa and America; as well as philosophy, movies and contemporary art - a practice I continue today. I believe in starting with a broad vision and condensing it to fit the local situation.” “Wang Shu Local Hero,” in *movingcities.org*, 2008.

⁴ Danish Architecture Centre (ed.), *Co-Evolution*, Danish Architecture Centre - Tenth Biennale of Architecture, Venice 2006; Worldwatch Institute Report, 2006 (www.worldwatch.org/pubs/sow/2006); UNDP, WHO, World Bank statistics 2004, 2005, 2006. See Ian Johnson, “China’s Great Uprooting: Moving 250 Million Into Cities,” *The New York Times*, 15 June 2013.

⁵ It was Zaha Hadid who compared the China of our day to an immense blank canvas waiting for the designer’s Promethean, unchained creativity.

⁶ Wang Shu, *To Build a Diverse World Following the Natural Way*, Lecture at UCLA, 29 February 2012.

⁷ A critical reflection dictated also by economic concerns, evaluating the investments sustained for the landmark buildings produced by star architects, such as the CCTV Tower in Beijing by Rem Koolhaas, which cost five billion yuan (\$783.80 million). For the interview with Wang Shu, see http://www.e-architect.co.uk/architects/wang_shu_amateur_architecture_studio.htm

⁸ “I always think of myself firstly as a member of the Literati; and secondly, it was almost accident that I’ve learned to do architecture. From this perspective, the way I see things is differently from most other architects.” From “Yang Lan - one on one - Wang Shu: The Reflection of Architecture” Chinese Network Television (CNTV). A further aspect worth mentioning, given the journal hosting this essay is that the Wangs conceive of their firm as a place for encounter and exchange of experiences and skills among students, workers, site foremen, and architects. On the cyclical reprisal of the theme of the literati/architect, see Lai Delin, “Wang Shu: in the Context of the Revival and Development of Chinese Literati Architectural Tradition,” in *Architectural Journal*, 2012 (5).

⁹ Wang Shu, quoted in “Wang Shu & Lu Wenyu, Ningbo History Museum,” GA Document, no. 112, *China Today*, May 2010; p. 95.

¹⁰ The shallow river that runs all the way into the entrance porch, the bank of pebbles, and the pool around the north end of the museum are all references to the Ta Shanyan (Tang dynasty) and the many hydraulic architectural projects scattered around Ningbo.

¹¹ As in traditional Chinese gardens, there are numerous entrances; among those used by the public one, as discreet as it is eccentric in shape, is set on the south flank below a courtyard; from the foyer a staircase leads to the history gallery, the children’s gallery, and the plaza which serves as a roof.

¹² The reference is to Li Tang (1050-1130).

¹³ On the rule of “three sections” or “three distances,” see François Cheng, *Vide et plein. Le langage pictural chinois* (1979), translated into English: *Empty and Full: the Language of Chinese Painting*, Shambhala Publications Inc., Boston 1994.

¹⁴ See Brendan McGetrick, “Why Wang Shu,” (New York, March 2012) now in *Domus*, <http://www.domusweb.it/content/domusweb/en/op-ed/2012/03/02/why-wang-shu.html>. The propensity of these architects for working cooperatively should not make us ignore the tough battle they fought with their clients to obtain full responsibility for the various phases of the work’s execution.

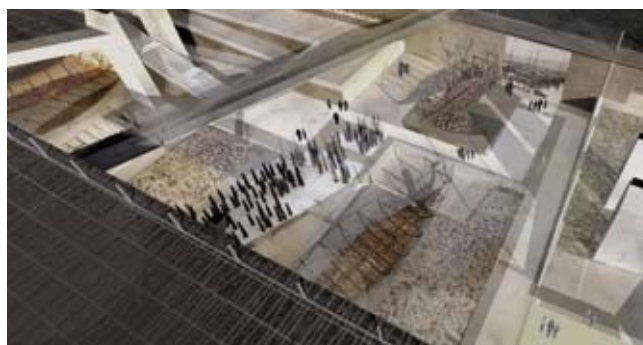
¹⁵ Attention to regional materials and building methods is a constant strategy for Amateur Architecture Studio. A further example of this is the Museum of the Imperial Road of the Southern Song Dynasty and the restoration of its ruins at Hangzhou (2007-2009). Here the wooden frame of the arch supporting the overhanging roof derives from a structural type for bridges worked out in the Zhejiang province and dating to the eleventh century. This choice, however, necessarily entailed a re-examination of the inherited procedures in order to answer to the new standards of static stability: the ancient is never catalogued as a repertory of closed individual stylistic elements and traits, but considered an open interpersonal process, thus subject to continuous revision, to inexhaustible metamorphosis.

¹⁶ “In Ningbo, we have found a unique brickwork technique. Recycling construction materials is quite popular in this region. Nearly every wall is built with a hybrid of different makes of bricks, you can count up to 84-87 different brick types within an area of 10 square meters on a wall - just imagine what an artistic state this technique has been grown into,” Wang Shu, quoted in *Wang Shu Architecture*, edited by Jiang Dai, City Walk Editorial Board, Tonji University Press, 2012, p. 22.

Francesco Cellini

Imaginary voyages by Alberto Pireddu

(page 44)



A suspended interior space in which skeletons of ships cross the seas of geographical maps.

Profound solitude upon lifeless objects, which seem to reveal a new life over the reflection of a warm Byzantine light.

Silent, astonished travelers recall sailors on a forgotten island.¹

It is the extraordinary metaphysical interior which Francesco Cellini and his team re-compose over fields and quarters of Yenikapi, ancient commercial doorway of the city of Istanbul to the brighter White Sea, crossroad of people and cultures.

Heart of a larger and more complex project, which attempts to combine actual potentiality and destination of the area with its dense archeological stratification, the exceptional fresco of a millennial history in which traces of pre-historical presence coexist with remnants of a glorious past.

For this reason, the labyrinthine Transfer Point in which intersect the essential needs of the railroad and subway lines, is designed in direct visual and physical intercourse with the large hall, similar to a building site that preserves discovered ancient ships, their loads of treasures, docks and facilities of the Port of Theodosius.

Above it, upon big pylons, it lies the keel of the City Archive, a modern cultural laboratory in which research, study and preservation of historical artifacts and documents cohabit with uses and functions of contemporary life.

A project created in section, therefore - in which each object is placed at the exact altitude where it was found - that reveals it's desire to promote the contaminations, people flows, but also the stubborn attempt to capture light: in the *canons a lumière* crossing the solid body of the Archive and in the transparencies of its long and low facades, where a myriad of fragments rest nestled among surfaces of large windows.

Returned to time and to the world, they finally shine under the sun, as the shells on the beach resting in the memories of Emerson's main character in his poem *Each and All*.

“I remember when I was a boy, walking along the river, how the colours and shapes of shells used to enchant me. I would collect handfuls of them and put them in my pocket. When I got home I could find nothing of what I had collected: nothing but wretched snails’ shells. From this I learnt that the composition and context are more important than the beauty of individual forms. On the shore they lay in solidarity with the sky and the sea”.²

Out of this treasure chest of precious marvels, the new Archaeological Park disclaims the measures and forms of the original port of Theodosius, recovering its walls, protecting parts that have not been carved out and bringing water inside, while the Kultur Park disappears under a green roof garden, spreading out around ‘arabesque’ small square courts.

Moreover, quoting Le Corbusier, in Istanbul, where soil is a “desert”,³ when “we build, trees are planted”.⁴

The Armenian quarter of Yali, risen during the sixteenth century in one of the basins of access to the port and the nineteenth-century neighborhood Inebey, along the Mustafa Kemal Caddesi street, find the right balance between architectural emergencies and minor building, often consisting of brittle wooden houses.

The sea gets closer to the city, through a rational redesign of all the road connections which provides underground fast movement roads, and the transformation process of the coastline finds its fulfillment in the creation of two artificial islands in front of the park and the harbor, this last expanded and reorganized.

The area of the *Fora Boario* finally released from the presence of road junctions, turns into an elevated pedestrian square, immersed in vegetation.

The Yenikapi project is the stunning metaphor of a journey.

A *Voyage d’Orient* among monuments of the city - mosques, *hans*, “Hagia Sophia and the palace of the Sultan”,⁵ gardens and cemeteries, fountains, pavements covered with smooth porphyry, with malachite, antique green glass and jade⁶ - which new architectures seek for comparison in a complete table that brings all together.

A journey through the complexities and contradictions of contempo-

